United Nations E/AC.51/2005/4

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 March 2005

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-fifth session
6 June-1 July 2005
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-second session on the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination

Note by the Secretary-General

In conformity with General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, 54/244 of 23 December 1999 and 59/272 of 23 December 2004, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-second session on the in-depth evaluation of the subprogrammes on General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination.

* E/AC.51/2005/1.

05-28498 (E) 250405

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-second session on the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination

Summary

The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on an in-depth evaluation.

The triennial review notes that the Committee referred the recommendations of the in-depth evaluation to the Economic and Social Council and the Committee on Conferences for review. OIOS considers that this referral did not constitute an endorsement of the recommendations. In the event, the intergovernmental review did not take place, although, as noted in the present report, the Secretariat has, since 2002, been engaged in extensive activities aimed at addressing many of the concerns expressed in the in-depth evaluation and adequate and appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place to keep Member States informed of the progress made in that regard.

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-second session in 2002, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the in-depth evaluation of the subprogrammes on General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination (E/AC.51/2002/4). The conclusions reached by the Committee and the recommendations made in connection with the evaluation, cited in paragraphs 4 and 6 below, were endorsed by the General Assembly in paragraph 7 of section III of its resolution 57/282 of 20 December 2002.

2. The present report contains the findings of the triennial review conducted to determine the extent to which the recommendations of the Committee, made three years ago, have been implemented. The status of the recommendations is discussed in section II below, under two headings: (a) review of the in-depth evaluation report by intergovernmental bodies; and (b) actions taken by the Secretariat during the period 2002-2004 relevant to the concerns expressed in the evaluation report.

3. The in-depth evaluation covered activities implemented by the Division (subsequently, Office) for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The present triennial review is based on review of information and documentation provided by the Office and the Division and consultations held with their staff. A draft of the report was made available to both, and their comments were taken into account.

II. Findings

A. Review of the in-depth evaluation report by intergovernmental bodies

4. The Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the in-depth evaluation report at its forty-second session[1] and referred the recommendations to the Economic and Social Council and Committee on Conferences. With respect to part one of the report, the Committee concluded that the conclusions and recommendations:

> "should be reviewed by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session in July 2002 and by its relevant subsidiary bodies, as well as by the competent Main Committees of the General Assembly".[2]

OIOS considered that this referral did not constitute an endorsement of the recommendations and consequently did not consider it appropriate to insist on their implementation.

5. The Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 2002, had before it as part of its documentation the report of the Committee on Programme and Coordination on its forty-second session but not the in-depth evaluation report.

---

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/57/16), paras. 260-274.

[2] Ibid., para. 271.

No resolution or decision of the Council at its substantive session of 2002 refers to the in-depth evaluation. OIOS concludes that the in-depth evaluation was not reviewed by the Council or its subsidiary bodies. OIOS notes, however, that the Chief of the Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in her presentation to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations in May 2002, referred to the in-depth evaluation as having credited the effectiveness of the outreach programme launched by the Section (E/2002/71 (Part II), para. 6).

6. With respect to part two of the in-depth evaluation report, the Committee for Programme and Coordination noted that:

> "some of the recommendations contained in part two of the report related to issues that were being or had been conclusively discussed by the General Assembly and its relevant bodies under various items of the agenda and, in that regard, invited the Committee on Conferences to consider recommendations 1 (c) and (d) and 2 contained in the report, and stressed that, in considering recommendation 2, the need for the provision of adequate services to Member States be kept in mind".[3]

OIOS considered that this referral did not constitute an endorsement of the recommendations and consequently did not consider it appropriate to insist on their implementation.

7. There is no reference to the report on the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination in the report of the Committee on Conferences for 2002.[4]

8. The General Assembly, as part of the documentation submitted to it for its consideration of the item on programme planning, had before it the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on its forty-second session. In section III of its resolution 57/282 of 20 December 2002, the Assembly:

> "3. *Emphasizes* the importance of the contribution of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, in particular the Main Committees of the General Assembly, in reviewing relevant recommendations on evaluation;
>
> "4. *Reiterates* its view that the relevant intergovernmental bodies, as well as the Economic and Social Council and the Main Committees of the General Assembly, should include in their programmes of work a review of recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination relevant to their work and take appropriate action;
>
> "5. *Regrets* that the relevant intergovernmental bodies did not review the recommendations on evaluation of the Committee".

[3] Ibid., para. 272.

[4] Ibid., *Supplement No. 32* (A/57/32 and Corr.1).

B. Action taken by the Secretariat during the period 2002-2004 relevant to the concerns expressed in the in-depth evaluation report

1. Economic and Social Council support and coordination

9. The report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2002 on the further strengthening of the Council (E/2002/62) addressed many of the concerns expressed in the in-depth evaluation. In the executive summary of the report, reference is made to suggestions for enabling the Council to introduce greater flexibility in scheduling its sessions, recommendations for improving the visibility and impact of operational activities and enhancing the effectiveness of the management of the work of its functional commissions, and suggestions for increasing the outreach of the Council to non-governmental organizations and civil society. As a result of its deliberations, the Council, on 26 July 2002, adopted agreed conclusions 2002/1, on improvements of its methods of work.[5] One year later, the Secretary-General submitted to the Council a report on the same item (E/2003/74), which contained a review of the implementation of agreed conclusions 2002/1 and related resolutions. In paragraph 6 of the report, the Secretary-General concluded that some significant progress had been made in the working methods of the Council over the past years, notably to increase efficiency and involve subsidiary bodies and other stakeholders in the Council's work, but that the Council would need to further develop modalities for integrated and effective consideration of the follow-up to the common agenda emerging from the major conferences, and made 10 recommendations in that regard. In an address to the Council on 10 September 2003, its President made a number of other suggestions for strengthening the role of the Council. Following on these suggestions, an informal panel discussion on reform of the Council was held in New York on 7 May 2004. Subsequently, in reflecting on the reform of the Council on the basis of the panel's discussion, the President of the Council, on 23 July 2004, elaborated, inter alia, on the role of the Council in the integrated and coordinated follow-up to conferences, interaction with the General Assembly and Security Council, the bridge-building function of the Council, and its working methods and visibility.

10. There is no reference to the report on the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination in the reform documents cited above.

11. In considering a draft of the present report, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted the following, which has a bearing on the implementation of recommendations 1 to 7 (reproduced in the annex to the present report), regarding the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination:

(a) *Recommendation 1. The report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Council for its high-level segment in 2004 made a noticeable impact on the deliberations. Most of its recommendations were included in the Ministerial Declaration. Cooperation with other Secretariat entities, in particular the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, was effective in preparing the documentation for the segment. Close cooperation was also ensured with the*

[5] See ibid., *Supplement No. 3* (A/57/3/Rev.1), chap. V, sect. A.

International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2003. Results of the panels and briefings held in preparation for the high-level segment were all summarized and posted on the Economic and Social Council website;

(b) *Recommendation 2. To improve interaction among functional commissions and promote coherence within the United Nations intergovernmental machinery, three types of meetings have been organized, involving the chairpersons of these commissions: (i) joint meetings of the bureaux of the functional commissions and the Economic and Social Council; (ii) a meeting of the chairpersons of the commissions with the Council; and (iii) a meeting of the chairpersons of all functional commissions. The Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination is currently assisting in a second round of consultations on a multi-year programme of work, which can be an important instrument in engaging the organizations of the United Nations system and the functional commissions in the work of the Council on common themes. The recommendation contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the integrated follow-up to conferences and adopted by the Council, namely, to combine the reports on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 50/227 of 24 May 1996, 52/12 B of 19 December 1997 and 57/270 B of 23 June 2003, will enable the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination to promote a common framework for such follow-up;*

(c) *Recommendation 3. See the comments of the Division for General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs in paragraph 15 below;*

(d) *Recommendation 4. The Office supported the successful conclusion by the General Assembly of the 2004 triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system with the adoption by the Assembly of resolution 59/250 of 22 December 2004. In that resolution, the Assembly identified tasks for the Economic and Social Council during its operational activities segment in 2005 and 2006;*

(e) *Recommendation 5. The reform of the functioning of the Economic and Social Council, including the scheduling of its segment meetings, has been considered by the Council and was the theme of its coordination segment of 2002. The Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination prepared a report for that meeting (E/2002/62), which contained specific recommendations. However, no consensus emerged on this issue. Discussions continue in informal meetings convened by the President of the Council;*

(f) *Recommendation 6. In the field of outreach and communication, the newly designed Economic and Social Council website is now accessible and operational. In addition, Power Point presentations on the work of the Council and its institutional mechanisms, prepared as tools for outreach activities, are available on the new website. The Economic and Social Council newsletter continues to be published. Since 2001, books on the proceedings and outcomes of the high-level segments of the Council have been prepared and disseminated;*

(g) *Recommendation 7. Closer monitoring of applications has been achieved through the consolidation of a database that is updated on a regular basis. Similarly, follow-up of non-governmental organizations in the General and Special categories has been undertaken when two or more quadrennial reports are*

outstanding from organizations that have failed to respond to routine attempts to contact them. The Secretariat has also facilitated the convening of short informal meetings during the session of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to decide on more appropriate and efficient methods of work in regard to the consideration of deferred and new applications.

2. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs

12. The report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289) addressed many of the concerns expressed in the in-depth evaluation. The report outlined proposals for the Department to play a more proactive role that goes beyond that of a passive service provider (para. 8). It put forward reform measures concerning the support provided to the President of the General Assembly; the role of the secretaries of bodies and organs; documentation and editorial support; translation services; and meetings programming and the use of technology. These reforms incorporated both structural changes and changing the culture of the Department (para. 22). Reforms aimed at the documentation situation (paras. 52-66) included:

(a) Improving the system of document processing;

(b) Better advance planning;

(c) Establishment of a slotting system for report processing;

(d) Enforcing page limits;

(e) Replacing summary records;

(f) Introducing printing on demand.

It was concluded that the actions outlined required a profound change in the character of the Department and in its operations (para. 67).

13. In a report prepared in response to the requests of the General Assembly in resolution 57/283 B of 15 April 2003 and as a follow-up to the above-mentioned report, the Secretary-General summed up the measures taken by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in the first year of reform and outlined the future course of action (A/58/213). In that report, the Secretary-General concluded that the first year of the reform had laid a solid foundation for fundamentally changing the existing philosophy and mentality and overhauling the modus operandi of the Department, and listed several follow-up steps (paras. 51-52). The General Assembly, by resolutions 58/126 of 19 December 2003 and 58/316 of 1 July 2004, took decisions on the revitalization of its work and, by paragraph 3 of the latter resolution, requested the Secretary-General to report on all aspects of this revitalization to the Assembly at its sixtieth session.

14. There is no reference to the report on the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination in the reform documents cited above. However, in the implementation plan for the reform of the Department, there is reference to the support of the Management Consulting Section of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in this work (A/58/213, para. 2). This internal support has been provided.

15. *In considering a draft of the present report, the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management noted the following, which has a bearing on the implementation of recommendations 1 to 5 (see annex), regarding the Department:*

(a) *The assistance provided by the technical secretariat to the General Assembly and its President, by providing relevant analytical and background information, contributed to the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution on revitalization;*

(b) *The assistance provided by the secretariat of the Economic and Social Council to the President and through joint meetings of the Council with the bureaux of the functional commissions, especially on reporting guidelines, helped in moving towards a better architecture between the Council and its functional commissions;*

(c) *The Department will continue to manage documentation workflow and meetings servicing, making optimal use of the human, financial and information technology resources available to it. Managing documentation will require extending advance planning beyond the Department to bring on board other departments and intergovernmental bodies in order to comply better with the requests of Member States for timelier issuance of documents;*

(d) *Emphasis will be placed on monitoring and self-evaluation of performance to ensure that balanced progress is made in achieving the four interrelated objectives of increased productivity, improved quality, increased timeliness and increased cost-effectiveness. A pilot on self-evaluation is currently under way with the assistance of OIOS. Its objective is to use the slotting system for managing and processing documentation as the basis for a self-evaluation exercise that subsequently can be replicated in other areas of the Department;*

(e) *The objective of the Department is to satisfy better the demands placed on its services. Through regular client surveys and with the guidance of intergovernmental oversight bodies, the Department will be able to target better the needs of its clients;*

(f) *The Department has initiated several far-reaching projects, such as the Electronic Meetings Planning and Resource Allocation System (e-Meets) and the electronic documentation management concept (e-Docs),to bring it up to date with new technology. Operational guidelines are being formulated for all areas in order to standardize operational procedures;*

(g) *The Department reports to the Committee on Conferences, and many of the recommendations and issues are discussed as a matter of course by the Committee during its sessions. The Department will continue its proactive involvement with the Committee on Conferences and the other intergovernmental bodies that it services.*

III. Conclusions

16. Since the intergovernmental reviews requested by the Committee for Programme and Coordination did not take place, the recommendations arising from the in-depth evaluation, reproduced in the annex to the present report, have not been subject to formal follow-up action by the Secretariat. However, the Secretariat has

been engaged, during the 2002-2004 review period, in extensive activities aimed at addressing many of the concerns expressed in the in-depth evaluation, and adequate and appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place to keep Member States informed of the progress made in that regard.

17. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination requested OIOS to include, in future in-depth and thematic evaluations as well as in triennial reviews, a brief section on questions in which intergovernmental guidance and follow-up, by the Committee or other appropriate intergovernmental bodies, would be useful.[6] OIOS would benefit from guidance by the Committee for Programme and Coordination on what further actions, if any, it should take with respect to the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination.

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

[6] Ibid., *Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para. 383.

Annex

Recommendations contained in the report on the in-depth evaluation of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination (E/AC.51/2002/4)

A. Economic and Social Council support and coordination

Recommendation 1
Make the preparatory process for the segments of the Economic and Social Council more deliberative and more reflective

(a) In collaboration with members of the Bureau of the Council, the Division[a] should prepare proposals of precise criteria to guide the selection of themes for the different segments of the Council that would reflect the comparative advantage held by the Council over its subsidiary bodies and other bodies of the United Nations and request the Secretariat to apply them in suggesting themes for consideration;

(b) The preparations for high-level, coordination and operational segments should make use, especially what theme is new and emerging or is one on which there has been limited prior consideration in intergovernmental forums, of expert groups and seminars of a duration that would permit the adoption of recommendations. The results of all panels and briefings related to any segment should be summarized and made available to the Council as official documents. Other units in the Secretariat with expertise in the matter should be involved in the preparation of the reports and the principal theme documents should be prepared by the Division;

(c) The Division should make proposals to the Bureau of the Council that the subjects of the joint meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions should be more closely related to the themes being taken up by the Council in its segments and their outcomes should be included in the documentation prepared in advance by the Secretariat. An effort should be made to reach an agreement to adopt an outcome document following the joint meeting;

(d) When the Council session is planned to be held at Geneva, the Division should make an effort to involve those delegations and agencies utilizing new communication techniques like teleconferencing.

Recommendation 2
Introduce longer-term planning in the work of the Council and establish better linkages with the functional commissions

In order to facilitate inputs by the functional commissions and enhance the ability of the Secretariat to prepare policy analysis to facilitate discussions, the Secretariat should suggest to the Council that it consider establishing an indicative multi-year work programme that could be further refined in the light of developments.

[a] Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination, subsequently designated Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination.

Recommendation 3
Improve the timeliness of documentation

The technical secretariat of the Council, which falls under the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, in consultation with the Division, should provide updated forecasts to the Bureau of the Council regarding the availability of documentation from various departments for all the segments.

Recommendation 4
Make the role of the Division more effective as a bridge between the organizations of the United Nations system and the General Assembly and the Council on operational issues

The Secretariat should recommend to the Second Committee of the General Assembly that, in reviewing the triennial report on operational activities, it could indicate those operational policy areas on which it wishes the Council to concentrate during the intervening two years.

Recommendation 5
Reconsider the schedule of segment meetings of the Council

In order to facilitate the negotiation process on single themes and to spread out the workload over a longer period of time, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Council, other substantive departments, agencies and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, should prepare a proposal for the Council to consider rescheduling its segments at different parts of the year, so that delegations can focus on negotiating agreements on single themes.

Recommendation 6
Make the work of the Council more visible and accessible

(a) In view of its importance for the Division's work in enhancing the outreach of the Council, the Division should propose revisions to the medium-term plan to include an outreach objective and expected achievements;

(b) The Division should redesign the website of the Council to emphasize the issues with which it has dealt and will deal. The site should be updated frequently and new developments posted as they happen.

Recommendation 7
Reduce the backlog of applications of non-governmental organizations and quadrennial reports

(a) The Division should develop a strategy to eliminate the backlog of non-governmental organization applications awaiting review and quadrennial reports processing. This should include an analysis of its causes, the use of new technology and proposing to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations new means to control the volume of incoming applications, such as establishing a ceiling on the number of applications accepted every year;

(b) The Secretariat should make suggestions to enhance the efficiency and working methods of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, such as developing a daily schedule of work prior to the beginning of the session, advising non-governmental organizations of the date when their applications will be

considered and, with respect to deferred applications, limiting the discussion to previously asked questions.

B. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs

Recommendation 1
Provision of advice and support provided by technical secretariats

(a) The Division of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs should provide advice to the office of the President on how to implement provisions of General Assembly resolutions on revitalization, particularly in relation to the grouping and scheduling of agenda items and reports, strengthening the office of the President and ensuring that the Department of Management develops proposals for reading paper ballots electronically;

(b) In consultation with substantive departments, the technical secretaries of the Main Committees should submit proposals to the respective bureaux, for their consideration, on which reports that could be integrated and which resolutions could be biennialized;

(c) The technical secretaries should consult with bureau members and government representatives about the need for computer support for drafting texts during negotiations and ensure that such support is made available;

(d) The internal manual prepared by the Economic and Social Council Servicing Branch should be updated with guidelines to cover practices and procedures that are ambiguous or may require interpretation, as needed, by the subsidiary organs of the Council; similar manuals should be developed for the other branches of the Division.

Recommendation 2
Improved resource utilization

At the organizational session of their respective intergovernmental body, technical secretaries should discuss with the chairs meeting statistics for the previous session and means of improving resource utilization.

Recommendation 3
Improved support provided by substantive secretariats

To facilitate access to information by bureau members of intergovernmental bodies, substantive secretariats should organize briefings on key reports, highlighting policy implications of analysis presented. Secretariat assistance to delegations in drafting proposals for texts at the request of delegations should be provided in full compliance with the relevant rules of procedure. The practical implications regarding such assistance should be clarified at the organizational session and communicated to the relevant substantive secretariats by the technical secretariat immediately after the organizational session.

Recommendation 4
Timely issuance of documentation

(a) The Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services should further explore reasons for lateness in submitting documentation by distinguishing, for example, between delays that are caused by the Department's dependency on the reports of other United Nations or external bodies, and those that could have been avoided through better planning of resources and accountability. In the case of the small proportion of documents that are submitted before deadlines, the Department should also be able to account for delays caused by the reshuffling of priorities or processing. The Department should formulate a plan to eliminate delays in the issuance of documentation caused by decisions that are under the control of the Secretariat;

(b) Notification of responsibilities for the implementation of recommendations should be made as expeditiously as possible at the end of each main and resumed session of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

Recommendation 5
Review by the Committee on Conferences

The present report, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination thereon, should be submitted to the Committee on Conferences at its meeting in 2002.